

## DENR to conduct regular water testing in Boracay

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will conduct regular water testing in Boracay beaches to determine if water quality in the island falls within standards.

"Aside from sewage problems, the DENR will also look into other problems besetting the island paradise, such as shoreline easement, forestland encroachment, solid waste management, intrusion in wetlands and existence of structures along the roads," Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu said yesterday.

The DENR recently conducted an ocular inspection of declared forestlands in Boracay and discovered that hotels were built in these areas.

As of last Monday, 85 establishments were issued show cause orders after they were found to be occupying forestland. The establishments were given 15 days to reply.

In Station 1, Cimatu noted he saw the rampant disregard by almost all beachfront resorts of the 25-plus five-meter shoreline easement, which is the required distance of any structure along the shore to the seawater at high tide.

Cimatu said these "illegal structures will have to go." The secretary also visited a wetland in Balabag, which is now occupied by houses. According to a map prepared by the National Mapping Resource and Information Authority, Boracay has nine wetlands but only two are left unoccupied. Cimatu underscored the need to recover the seven wetlands.

Cimatu said he was also disappointed to find out that the materials recovery facility in Manoc-Manoc that he previously cleared of garbage is again an open dumpsite.

"Garbage collection should be done in the evening and then shipped by barge to mainland Malay to prevent the accumulation of garbage in the island," Cimatu said.

Earlier, the DENR sent out mission teams consisting of personnel from different DENR regional offices to three barangays

in Boracay – Balabag, Manoc-Manoc and Yapak. Boracay is divided into six operational sectors.

Their primary mission is to serve the show cause orders to a total of 842 establishments initially found to have violated environmental laws, particularly the Clean Water Act of 2004 and the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000.

President Duterte has ordered Cimatu to clean up Boracay within six months, or else the entire island will be shut down.

The mission teams are also tasked to check if the establishments are properly connected to the main sewer lines or have their own wastewater treatment facilities.

They also have to verify which establishments are directly discharging untreated wastewater into Boracay waters.

The teams were directed to report to the designated command center their accomplishment every hour, particularly on the number of notices served and rejected as well as the names of the recipients or occupants not included in the list.

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#### **Tourism heritage law**

Tourism Secretary Wanda Teo is pushing for the passage of a law to protect the country's tourist attractions.

"If enacted and implemented, a tourism heritage law will be more effective in ensuring the preservation and protection not only of Boracay island and its seawaters but all of the country's natural tourist destinations," Teo said.

Teo, who heads a multi-agency program called "Oplan Save Boracay," said a delegation of senators will take a look at the actual situation in Boracay as part of a Senate inquiry in aid of legislation following Duterte's order to clean up the island.

Teo said the department, the DENR, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) are crafting a joint administrative order to immediately address Boracay's problems.

- With Catherine Talavera